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AFMC commander awarded enlisted members' highest honor

by Tech Sgt. Carl Norman, AFMC Public Affairs



Gen. Lester L. Lyles

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio — More than 300 enlisted members gathered at the Air Force Museum here Nov. 7, to usher the Air Force Materiel Command commander into Air Force history as one of only 207 people inducted into the Order of the Sword.

Only the fifth person inducted in the AFMC Order of the Sword, Gen. Lester L. Lyles attended with his wife and his four children. Present and former command chief master sergeants, former Air Force Systems Command commander and Order of the Sword recipient Gen. Benard Randolph, and various AFMC leaders also watched the command's enlisted members crown Lyles as the "enlisted person's general."

The Order of the Sword dates beyond the Air Force, back to the 1500s and the days of kings and noblemen, said Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Gerald Murray during the ceremony. Ancient warrior leaders would, on occasion, honor a leader and pledge their loyalty by ceremoniously presenting him a sword.

"The enlisted corps holds the Order of the Sword near to its heart and reserves it only for those who have impacted them in a way deserving of this recognition," Murray said. "We bestow this recognition to great leaders who make the youngest airman feel like an intimate part of their vision. Their obvious passion for the mission and the people who perform it draws followers to them and keeps them committed."

Murray's comments followed a ceremony filled with the pomp and circumstance seemingly only military ceremonies can offer — the presentation of the nearly six-foot sword, a proclamation and citation recording Lyles' induction and as well as ceremony committee members presenting a hand-made etched lead crystal decanter with four glasses, each bearing the Order of the Sword emblem and Lyles' name to commemorate the event.

Committee members also presented Lyles' wife, Mina, with a gold pendant with the Order of the Sword symbol on it to thank her for her "dedicated and patriotic support of General Lyles...of our enlisted corps... and our nation."

Since taking command of AFMC in April 2000, Lyles has racked up an impressive list of accomplishments geared toward the enlisted force, said Chief Master Sgt. David Mimms, AFMC command chief. These include providing a discretionary checkbook totaling more than \$500,000 directly to command chiefs across the command to support airmen as they saw fit; providing more than \$150,000 to AFMC Airman Leadership Schools for technical upgrades; providing the senior NCO academy and each state-side NCO academy \$15,000 to establish AFMC focus rooms for student support; providing more than \$220,000 in fallout funds for command chief quality-of-life projects; and funding more than \$6 million to support families around the command via the Year of the Family initiative.

Additionally, the chief said Lyles sought the enlisted perspective and insistently adjusted his schedule to meet with chiefs groups to junior airman forums to hear their views.

"Our United States Air Force, and our nation, is truly blessed when endowed with leaders who possess insight, wisdom and the ability to inspire in people the determination to pursue and achieve the highest in human goals, accomplishments and values," Mimms said. "This evening pay tribute to one who has epitomized, for us, the leadership and represents the meaning of our sword - truth, justice and power rightfully employed - a leader among leaders, an airman among airmen."

With that, a very humbled Lyles took the podium.

"I'm speechless," he said. "I'm extremely honored and humbled to be the recipient of this very

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prestigious and very time-honored award. I really just want to say thank you to all of you.”

Considering himself merely a Redskins fan from Washington, D.C., Lyles said what’s special about where the Air Force is today is the blessing and honor to serve “this great nation, in this fantastic organization we call the United States Air Force and with all of you.

“That, to me, is the number one thing of all,” Lyles said, looking at the sword. “It’s symbolic of what is most important in this Air Force — our people, in particularly our enlisted corps.

“I am very humbled to be the recipient of this Order of the Sword presentation, but I accept it on your behalf. Not because of anything I may have done, but because of what all of you represent. You are the ones who should be dealt the gratitude and the thanks for the sacrifices you and your peers make every day for our Air Force, Air Force Materiel Command and for this great country.”

Lyles also recognized the commitment that comes with the Order of the Sword induction - a commitment of legacy of the Air Force, what the Order of the Sword represents, but also to stay the course relative to Air Force men and women.

“I accept that commitment and pledge to you that I’ll continue to give and give as hard as I can to support all of you in what you represent - the men and women of this great institution,” he said. @